



BEST PRACTICES IN PROGRAMS SERVING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

Quality programs for students diagnosed as ED reflect similar components to quality alternative education programs for at risk or incarcerated youth. According to McLaughlin et al (1994), these programs share common solutions to typical challenges:

1. Students with ED fare better with a wraparound approach, where multiple agencies involved with the student and her/his family coordinate their services.
2. Families are included in the therapeutic, academic and behavioral programming of the identified child.
3. Programs include behavior and social skill supports that are positively oriented and teach and enhance new skills with an overall goal of facilitating success for the student in the general school or work environment.
4. Districts, Counties and Non Public Schools provide both incentives to attract qualified staff and first-rate training to improve the skills of existing staff.

Several other researchers have made lists of essential program components for successful alternative/ED programs.

Lange and Sletten (2002) listed these for alternative ed programs:

1. A low teacher/pupil ratio and program size
2. The availability of one-on-one interaction between staff and students
3. A climate that supports learning
4. Opportunities for relevant experiences that are consistent with the students' future goals
5. Opportunity for students to develop and exercise self-control in decision making
6. A flexible structure that accommodates the student's academic and social-emotional needs
7. A caring environment that builds and fosters resilience
8. Training and support for teachers in working with both typically functioning and special needs students
9. Integration of research into practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies, and integration of special education services
10. Research and evaluation of the impact of the program on the student population
11. Clearly identified enrollment criteria and program goals
12. Interagency linkages to ensure that a full service continuum is available for student with special education needs

Quinn, Rutherford and Osher (1999) defined seven essential elements of alternative education programs that focus on serving students with special needs:

1. Functional Assessment as a continuous process to determine a student's strengths and weaknesses, in accordance with the IEP.
2. Functional curriculum that addresses the whole child and includes social skills, job skills, life skills and academics and related curricula that promote self-control and competence.

3. Effective and efficient instruction employing student-centered instructional approaches aligned with both functional assessment and curricula in order to address the student's IEP goals.
4. Transition supports to ensure smooth movement across educational settings, including clear plans for moving records, transition to home school, and follow up.
5. Comprehensive systems exist to coordinate the special ed services (e.g., - wraparound).
6. Appropriate safeguards exist to ensure that IEPs are met and multi-disciplinary team planning occurs.
7. A supportive climate exists including inviting and interesting classrooms to ensure staff and students that learning is taking place in a safe, disciplined, and orderly environment.

Furthermore, Osher and Hanley (2001) examined programs for youth with emotional and behavioral problems and produced a list of seven common characteristics:

1. High educational and behavioral expectations for all young people, accompanied by supports to meet those expectations.
2. Capacity Building in the school, home, community and work place.
3. Diversity is valued and culturally competent approaches are employed.
4. Effective programs collaborate with families and support their active participation in designing, developing, implementing and evaluating interventions and programs.
5. Attention is given to assessment and early intervention.
6. Staff capacity is developed and supported.
7. Collaborative practices such as wraparound are family driven, not agency driven.

These researchers also identified five barriers to successful program implementation.

1. Funding
2. Institutional inertia, where an agency or agencies don't align themselves with the values of the seven components, or when one agency won't change while the others will.
3. Lack of effective services or service options.
4. Building to scale in an effective manner, or growing the program at multiple sites because implementation is fairly inconsistent.
5. Cultural issues and values, such as cultural competence, respect for families, a focus on student and family strengths, and collaboration, are not always consistent.

References:

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